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ABSTRACT

This study investigated district leadership development policies, practices, and programs and administrators' recommendations for improving them in three districts. The study explored six dimensions of district activity that were likely to influence the formal and informal development of school leaders: direction, culture, policies and procedures, budget, leadership development programs and activities, and feedback about performance. Although school and district leadership was reported to be an important topic in each district studied, opinions varied about the most important characteristics of effective leadership. Increasing achievement, preparing students for productive futures, focusing on instruction, the ability to work with school communities, being a change agent, solving problems, collegiality, and responding to external demands were cited as important leadership characteristics. None of the three districts had a formal, written leadership development plan, so leadership development occurred in the context of existing policies and practices related to recruiting, selecting, hiring, and supervising administrators. One of the districts was considering the need for a leadership development program linked to district direction. Respondents indicated they had good relationships with most of their peers, supervisors, and supervisees and that their supervisors for the most part were caring and supportive. (Contains 35 references.) (DFR)

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DISTRICT APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING LEADERSHIP

Case Studies of Three Districts

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This work was prepared by Karen Kaplan, Ph.D., and Mary Jean Taylor, Ph.D., under a subcontract with the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). The views and opinions of the authors do not necessarily reflect the views of McREL. The purpose of this study was to investigate district policies, practices, and programs that support and enhance the leadership skills of school administrators. It was not intended to provide an in-depth evaluation of the leadership capacity of the districts studied.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most persistent findings from research on high-performing schools has been the presence and influence of an effective principal. Research suggests that formal administrator preparation programs are not able to respond to the needs of the K–12 system as quickly as desired, and that the most influential experiences and training for administrators are often on-the-job learning. As a result, the policies and practices of the district, whether formal and well organized or informal and idiosyncratic, have a major influence on leadership development and the exercise of leadership at the school level. There is limited information about the role districts play in developing leaders, ensuring their success and satisfaction, and preparing leaders for professional advancement. Adding urgency to the need to better understand formal and informal leadership development processes is a concern that massive retirements will soon diminish the availability of high-quality administrative talent at the building and district levels.

ISSUES

ANTICIPATED SHORTAGES

Education policy makers are concerned about the quantity and quality of people entering school administration. Historically, school administrators have come up through the ranks, beginning as teachers and moving up the career ladder to become assistant principals, principals, central office staff, or superintendents. There has always been a large pool of teachers ready and willing to move into administrative positions, but the pool is shallower than it has been in the past (Keller, 1998b; Natt, 2000). Concerned about a shrinking pool of candidates for administrative positions at all levels, Education leaders and policy makers have initiated a variety of large-scale efforts to study the issues and develop policies to assure a continued stream of capable school administrators (see Natt, 2000;Olson, 2000a).

The relationship among three factors determines the depth of a pool: the size of the container, the rate of flow into the pool, and the rate of flow out of the pool. When an *increase* in demand combines with an *increase* in retirements or resignations and a *decrease* in the flow of candidates into a pool, the result is quite noticeable. There are indications that all three of these changes are occurring.

First, predicted shortfalls in the number of qualified candidates may be further exacerbated by the fact that population growth has resulted in a small increase in the number of positions available. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a 10–20 percent increase in school administrator jobs through 2005, primarily as a result of retirements (Keller, 1998b).

Second, there is evidence that more principals are planning to take early retirement. The 1993–94 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1997) provided some insight into changes in principals' future plans. A comparison of the 1990–91 and 1993–94 data found a 10 percent reduction in the number of respondents who planned to stay "until they were eligible to retire" and a comparable increase in the "undecided" category. Even though respondents reported high levels of satisfaction with their career

choice, the mean age when they planned to retire was 57, a year earlier than the mean had been a decade earlier. These findings were consistent across school level, percentage of minority enrollment, school size, and community type (i.e., rural/small town, urban fringe/large town, or central city). Data from the SASS administered in the 1999–2000 school year will provide further insight into emerging trends related to principals' long-range plans (NCES, 1997). A 1998 study of K–8 principals, sponsored by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), reported a 42 percent turnover in the principalship during the previous decade, a trend it predicted would continue into the next decade (Doud & Keller, 1998).

Third, fewer teachers are entering administration for a variety of reasons. The demands of the job have changed significantly. Standards and high-stakes testing have increased expectations and accountability for student results. There is more external scrutiny and pressure on schools, more people to involve in decision making, a more diverse and challenging student population (Olson, 2000a), and an increasingly volatile climate (Lashway, 1999). Principals report more opportunity to influence school results, but less authority to make changes as they see fit (Doud & Keller, 1998). Doud and Keller (1998) report that 32 percent of K–8 principals are concerned about job security. Site-based decision making offers opportunities for teachers to exercise leadership through other venues without experiencing the stresses associated with leadership positions (Lashway, 1999). And, of course, compensation is a factor. In a national study commissioned by NAESP and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), 60 percent of the districts said the most frequently mentioned factor discouraging candidates was money, followed by long hours and stress. The U.S. Department of Education has proposed funding designed to alleviate the predicted shortage of school principals (NAESP, 2000).

Changing Expectations for the Role of Principals

The history of American education has been one of long periods of relative stability interspersed by shorter periods of dramatic change. Our current era of change is marked by a tension between how reform leaders and policy makers view the principal's role and the day-to-day practicalities of the job. Nonetheless, there is no question that the job requires a different set of skills than it has in the past. Thomas Sobol, an education professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, was quoted in *Education Week* (Olson, 2000b) as saying, "There's a sort of unarticulated, growing understanding that we've conceived the job of school leader wrong for contemporary needs and conditions, and that it needs to be changed" (p. 1).

Principals are being asked to focus more of their time on instructional leadership. Although instructional leadership has been promoted widely in the leadership literature, many principals, in spite of their best intentions, are unable to find the time or do not have the skills or interest to become true instructional leaders. In the 1993–94 NCES study, approximately 40 percent of school administrators had experience as athletic coaches, compared to 20 percent who had experience as curriculum specialists or coordinators. But Hawley's study of student performance in Maryland schools (cited in Keller, 1998a) found that the most successful schools, as measured by the state's assessment, had principals who were instructional leaders. These schools also recruited good teachers and demanded high-quality teaching, monitored student achievement, and found extra

resources to help meet their goals. Principals of less successful schools reportedly "functioned more as managers and had low instructional expectations for teachers" (Keller, 1998a, p. 26).

The following list published in *Education Week* (Keller, 1998a) offers insights into current thinking about what makes a good principal:

- Recognizes teaching and learning as the main business of a school
- Communicates the school's mission clearly and consistently to staff members, parents, and students
- Fosters standards for teaching and learning that are high and attainable
- Provides clear goals and monitors the progress of students toward meeting them
- Spends time in classrooms and listening to teachers
- Promotes an atmosphere of trust and sharing
- Builds a good staff and makes professional development a top concern
- Does not tolerate bad teachers (p. 25)

It is interesting to note that the list does not mention basic management expectations for principals, such as budgeting, scheduling, supervising personnel, and responding to parental demands. Traditional management responsibilities have not disappeared, they just seem to be assumed. Yet they may take up more of a principal's time than ever before given the devolution of decision making, hiring and budgeting responsibilities to the school site. Balancing routine but necessary management responsibilities with the responsibilities that accompany "pathfinding" leadership can be difficult for even the most experienced leader, yet increasingly important.

Increased state pressures for the implementation of a standards-based system and higher test performance by *all* students are forcing schools and principals to change how they do their work. Such current reform efforts increase the need for communication across classrooms as well as shared decision making or negotiation of curricular and instructional decisions that have long been the prerogative of individual teachers. The potential for conflict increases with the increased need for cooperation across classrooms. These changes require different administrative skills than in the past.

The concept of a learning organization (Senge, 1990), or learning community favors distributive forms of leadership (Lambert, 1998; CCSSO, 1996) over more traditional top-down methods. But researchers caution that there is not just *one* way to be a successful leader. An emphasis on learning at all levels in an organization legitimizes the premise that leaders need support for continued learning. If they are expected to create and sustain a professional learning community within their schools, they must know how to articulate a common vision, engage their staff in shared decision making, and provide support for productive interaction and learning among their staff. Both new and veteran administrators struggle to find an appropriate balance between being directive vs. empowering staff and sharing leadership (Cascadden, 1997). In short, traditional expectations of leaders as people who have the answers and implement their vision are giving way to notions of building a shared vision and of the leader as a fellow learner — or lead learner (see Senge, 1990; and Fullan & Steiglebauer, 1991).

School leaders must be able to sort through the conflicting messages they get. On the one hand, leaders who take charge and turn things around are held up as the ideal. Their success stories are widely shared and their methods promoted by school reformers. "Strong leadership" is cited as a contributing factor in virtually every description of a successful school. Yet school leaders are expected to be "change agents" and lead whole school reform at a time when they may be experiencing their own uncertainties about direction (Lashway, 1997). On the other hand, most reform efforts envision a shared, distributive leadership model that depends on a principal's ability to listen and build leadership capacity throughout the organization. Sharing decision making that retains responsibility requires skills that many principals do not currently have (Olson, 2000c).

PROBLEMS WITH PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Michael Usdan, president of the Institute for Educational Leadership, was quoted by *Education Week* (Olson, 2000a) as saying, "There is widespread unhappiness and disillusionment with the lack of relevance of most administrator-training programs" (p. 17). As accountability requirements have increased and expectations for student performance have risen, so has dissatisfaction with administrator preparation programs. In most states, public school principals are required to have training in educational administration from a state-approved program, which usually means a master's degree in educational administration. State-approved programs, usually offered by colleges and universities, have been strongly criticized on the grounds that they are inadequate and unrelated to the realities of the job (NCES, 1997). Although many colleges and universities develop collaborative arrangements with local school districts to provide leadership academies or certification programs specifically designed to address district needs, frequently cotaught by district staff, there are deep cultural differences between K–12 and the higher education community (Trubowitz & Longo, 1997). Brent (1998) analyzed the "unsettling literature" on principal preparation programs and concluded that neither the level of principals' graduate training nor specific training in educational administration had a positive influence on five measures of school effectiveness (leader, policy, help, order, and climate). Practicing principals viewed their teaching experience and on-the-job learning as the best training for the principalship (Miller, cited in NCES, 1997).

The three major professional organizations for school administrators, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), have been increasingly vocal about their dissatisfaction with the administrator preparation programs provided by colleges and universities. These organizations, which plan to be players in the process of developing school and district leaders (Education Research Service, 2000; Olson, 2000a), have begun work on establishing a national board for school administrators, similar to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, to establish standards for principals (Olson, 2000a). There are many details yet to be worked out (e.g., whether there should be different requirements for elementary, middle, and high school principals, or for principals and superintendents). The deputy executive director of AASA has gone so far as to imply that if universities don't improve their programs, the three administrator organizations might take over the task of preparing administrators (Schneider, 1999). The three groups also are exploring the possibility of offering online courses for school administrators (Olson, 2000a).

Influential government and philanthropic policy organizations also have initiated large-scale efforts to respond to the predicted shortage of high-quality candidates for the principalship. The priorities of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2000) for 2000 include efforts to improve the performance of education leaders by clarifying expectations and promoting and supporting "efforts to design policies and practices for the recruitment, preparation, continuing development and career incentives of school leaders" (p. 5). A number of states have tied their administrator licensure renewal process to achievement of K–12 standards (see http://www.teachingandlearning.org), and more states have plans to do so.

ROLE OF THE DISTRICT IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Recruitment

The changing demands of the job and an effort to increase the representation of diverse cultural and ethnic groups have stimulated a need for more active approaches to the identification and encouragement of potential school leaders (Lashway, 1999). A survey of a random sample of 403 districts with student enrollments of 300 or more, sponsored by NAESP and NASSP (cited in Keller, 1998b), found that half of the districts were concerned about a shortage of qualified candidates — even though they did not indicate dissatisfaction with the candidates that had been recently hired. Two-thirds of the urban districts and 44 percent of the suburban respondents identified increasing the number of minority-group members in management positions as an issue. Even so, only about one-fourth of them, mostly urban districts, reported programs aimed at recruiting candidates from current staff (see Keller, 1998b).

Some districts have developed programs to encourage aspiring principals and/or provide leadership development opportunities through in-service training. In the 1993–94 Schools and Staffing Survey, 39 percent reported they had participated in district or school programs for aspiring principals, 86 percent received in-service training in evaluation and supervision, 75 percent received district in-service training in management techniques, and 41 percent had participated in an administrative internship aside from the coursework for a degree (NCES, 1997). All of these were activities made available to them *prior to becoming a principal*. Participation in courses for aspiring administrators was higher among women than men (45% compared to 36%) and even higher for minority vs. white principals (58% compared to 35%). District size influences the availability of preparation programs. Principals in central city districts (52%) were more likely to participate than those in urban fringe/large town (43%) or rural/small town districts (30%) (NCES, 1997). Such activities have undoubtedly contributed to the dramatic gender shift in the principalship. In 1998, 42 percent of all K–8 principals were women, an increase of 20 percent overall over the past decade. Among those who had been principals for five years or less, 65 percent were women (Doud & Keller, 1998).

Selection

Districts also are exploring new methods for selecting candidates. Interviews are still the primary method used, but some districts are exploring a variety of processes and tools to supplement the interview and add breadth and objectivity to the selection process (Lashway, 1999). Some districts put candidates through a formal and rigorous assessment process (an assessment center

approach similar to the NASSP process) with paper-and-pencil instruments supplemented by simulation activities, and scored by practicing administrators. A new instrument, the School Leaders Licensure Assessment, may prove to be a cost-efficient tool for smaller districts. The test, developed by Educational Testing Service and CCSSO's Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), addresses standards for principals developed by ISLLC (see CCSSO, 1996).

One of the traditional stepping stones into the principalship has been the assistant principalship, but opportunities to prepare via that route tend to be restricted to secondary schools, and then the roles assigned or assumed by the assistant principals tend to move them away from instructional issues (Richard, 2000). Secondary schools are more likely than elementary schools to have assistant principals, and most K–8 schools do not have an assistant principal unless enrollment exceeds 600 students (Doud & Keller, 1998).

Induction

The step from the classroom to the principalship, or even from an assistant principalship to the principalship, is a big one. The almost overwhelming challenges of those initial years have long been recognized. Although more proactive approaches to the identification, selection, preparation, and training of school administrators may increase the candidate pool, the socialization process for new principals tends to be inconsistent and idiosyncratic, and often results in behavior that copies that of established administrators (see Hart, 1991).

There are signs that the situation is slowly changing. Although any district can offer an induction program, it is more likely to happen when there are statutory requirements, even though a law cannot ensure the programs will be of the quality or duration needed. Eleven states require formal induction programs for new administrators, and seven more are in the process of planning or implementing such programs (CCSSO, 1999). If a leadership shortage develops as predicted, it will become increasingly important for districts to do whatever they can to enhance and support increased effectiveness of both new and current administrators.

Ongoing Development

Since continued restructuring and reform efforts are likely to bring new challenges for administrators, districts need to attend to the development of all administrators. Thirty-seven (37) states have license renewal requirements for administrators, but only a few states link those requirements to achievement of standards. However, other states plan to do so. Spillane and Thompson (1997) studied nine Michigan school districts in terms of their involvement in science and math reform and found wide variation from one district to another. They concluded that staffing, materials, and other resources are necessary for reform, but not sufficient. Leaders who are committed, knowledgeable, and trustworthy are imperative.

In fact, spending on professional development for administrators has risen dramatically over the past two decades (Keller, 1998a), although there is little reason to believe the professional development for administrators has been any more focused or efficient than that being provided for teachers. Goertz, Floden, and O'Day (1996) studied 12 reforming schools in six districts and concluded that districts can be a key force for building the capacity of teachers and schools. They

recommended that policy makers help districts enhance their capacity-building efforts. But there are considerable barriers to school leaders' efforts to focus on their own learning: lack of time, limited rewards, fear that making their own learning visible might be perceived as an admission of imperfection and undermine their authority or credibility, and previous experiences with professional development activities that did not meet their needs. Barth (1997) suggests that districts help administrators overcome these obstacles by creating learning opportunities that are reflective, collegial, unconventional, and principal centered.

Erlandson (1994) asked Texas principals about professional development experiences throughout their careers (pre-service, induction, and in-service) and found they had experienced a general lack of support, which respondents reportedly felt made their adjustment to the job all the more difficult. Lashway (1999) warns that many schools fail to support professional development for leaders, a situation that may result in leaders being ill-equipped to handle today's challenges.

Statistics reported by NCES (1997) suggest that districts may be taking a more active role in administrator preparation and development. At the very least, the ease of access to district programs for teachers suggests administrators are getting a significant share of their formal professional development through the district. There is limited anecdotal data about the district role in school leaders' ongoing professional development and no quantitative data at the national level about the nature and extent of district sponsored professional development for administrators after their induction years. Miles and Guiney (2000) assert that districts are the most obvious candidates for supporting teachers and principals in making needed changes in curriculum and organization, but few of them even keep track of their current use of professional development resources, let alone use them strategically. Any leadership development effort must take into account individual capabilities, hopes and needs as well as the capabilities, hopes and needs of the organization.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

This study investigated district leadership development policies, practices, and programs and administrators' recommendations for improving them in three districts. The study explored six dimensions of district activity that were likely to influence the formal and informal development of school leaders: direction, culture, policies and procedures, budget, leadership development programs and activities, and feedback about performance. Each dimension is described briefly below.

A clear vision or statement of *direction* increases the efficiency of decision making throughout an organization because it serves as an "all-important bridge" between an organization's present and past (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). District leadership development activities that serve no overriding purpose are vulnerable to being considered a waste of time and eliminated. Conversely, a clear sense of purpose that drives all district functions, including leadership development, can foster meaningful assessment of the outcomes of district programs. Alignment between district and school goals and leadership development activities would appear to increase the effectiveness of schools throughout a district (a key consideration in scaling up).

Culture is often described as "the way we do things around here" and consists of the informal, often unspoken but pervasive values that shape behavior throughout an organization (Sergiovanni, 1996). Alignment between words and action improves the prospects for long-term, sustainable change. One of the ISLLC standards for principals relates to building a school culture — a recognition of the importance of culture to the function of an organization. Collaborative cultures hold great promise for improving school results (Rosenholtz, 1989; Fullan, 1992; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The fact that some of the most successful schools in the nation have had to work very hard to develop cultures contrary to the prevailing culture in their districts, often simply ignoring district directives, suggests that district culture strongly influences school performance (Killion, personal communication, 1999).

Policies and procedures add flesh to the bones of strategic plans and mission and goals statements. Policies, general statements formally adopted by the board of education, provide direction to staff and let people know what is important to district leadership. Procedures provide detail about the implementation of board policies. The existence or absence of a leadership development policy may be an indication of the value a district places on the ongoing learning of school leaders.

After studying leadership development in institutions of higher education, Green and McDade (1991) concluded that few institutions have a plan or resources allocated for leadership development. Most of the reasons for neglecting leadership development can be traced to short-term thinking or to a number of rationalizations, for example that current leadership cannot be taught.

An organization's priorities are made manifest through the *budget*. If continued learning and growth of school leaders are valued, funds are allocated for that purpose. Although the lack of a line item in district- and/or school-level budgets does not necessarily indicate a lack of leadership development opportunities, it does affect the extent to which leadership growth can occur systematically across the district. The size and use of professional development funds for administrators' professional development makes a statement about district expectations for school leaders and the extent to which the district has assumed responsibility for assuring adequate support for optimal principal and school performance.

Leadership development programs or activities, all of the growth opportunities that a district offers potential and acting school leaders, may take the form of a mentor program, classes and workshops, summer institutes, focused discussions among administrators at meetings, book talks, attendance at a conference, or visits to exemplary schools. As potential leaders, teachers have the chance to test their interest and skills through stretch assignments such as serving on committees, chairing a task force, or serving on an accreditation team. Quasi-administrative positions can provide people with opportunities to learn about their leadership potential and practice key leadership and management skills in a safe setting. Corporations, especially large ones, unwilling to bank their futures on finding effective managers, devote enormous resources to the design and continuous improvement of leadership development programs (Vicere & Fulmer, 1998).

Feedback about performance includes districts' formal administrator evaluation procedures and the informal practices that let people know if they are doing what is expected of them. At least 40 states require formal evaluations for principals (Keller, 1998a). The process for administrator

evaluations is a topic of much discussion and debate, and there is a new willingness to remove principals from schools that are not showing expected gains (Hendrie, 1998). School leaders who are not clear about expectations for their role will do the best they can, but lack of clarity can result in wide variation in the quality of leadership from one school to another. When aligned with organizational direction, the formal evaluation process can be a powerful tool for assuring realization of the districts' strategic mission and goals. Ongoing, informal feedback provides guidance for timely course corrections and acknowledges and reinforces a job well done. Table 1 summarizes the six research dimensions and the overarching questions that guided the interviews.

Table 1. Dimensions of District Systems that Impact Leadership Development

Dimension	Overaching Questions
Direction	Does the district have a commonly understood strategic plan and/or mission and goals statement?
Culture	What does the district value in school leaders? Are leaders' perceptions about values consistent within levels? Across levels? What kind of relationships does the district foster among administrators?
Policies and Procedures	Does the district have a leadership development plan and/or explicit policies regarding leadership development? If yes, what are the goals? To what extent is this plan or set of policies linked to the district strategic plan and/or mission and goals statement? What are the common paths to leadership within the district? What are the district's recruitment practices?
Budget	Does the district allocate funds at the district and school levels specifically for leadership development? How are these dollars spent? To what extent does the district monitor impact at the school or district level?
Leadership development programs and activities	Is there a single position or office that is responsible for leadership development? What support does the district provide for new vs. experienced building level administrators? How are leadership development programs or activities targeted? How do they relate to the district strategic plan/mission and goals statement?
Feedback about performance	What is the formal evaluation process used in this district? What is the nature of the informal feedback school administrators receive about their performance? How is the administrator evaluation process linked to the leadership development goals and/or the strategic plan or mission and goals statement?

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews with school leaders from three districts provided the data for this report. The districts that were studied were a small/rural district, an urban fringe/large town district, and a large urban/central city district located in two of the states in the seven-state region served by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). Central office administrators from each district provided a list of recommendations from which the researchers selected potential candidates and encouraged the participation of central office and school-level leaders. To ensure a range of views, researchers requested individuals with different lengths of service as elementary or secondary administrators and a balance of gender and ethnicity. Participation was voluntary and confidential. The response rate was very high in all three districts. A total of 66 interviews included the superintendent and president of the board of education in each district, 15 central office staff, 31 principals, and 26 assistant principals/individuals in quasi-administrative positions. The composition of the respondent sample, by district size, is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Composition of the Sample

Type of District	Respondents						
	Board of Education	Central Office	Elementary Principals	Elementary Assistant Principals	Secondary Principals	Secondary Assistant Principals	**Total**
Small, rural	1	3	3	N.A.	3	N.A.	**10**
Fringe/large town	1	7	6	N.A.	5	6	**25**
Urban/inner city	1	8	8	5	6	3	**31**
Total	**3**	**18**	**17**	**5**	**14**	**9**	**66**

The interview questions and protocol were adapted for each district. Two instruments, consisting of open-ended questions, were developed for the two respondent groups: (a) the district, which included central office administrators (including the superintendent), and the President of the Board of Education; and (b) the building, which included principals, assistant principals, and individuals in quasi-administrative positions. Individuals were called to set up an appointment for a telephone interview and a copy of the questionnaire was faxed, e-mailed or mailed to respondents in advance. Across the three districts, 66 people were interviewed. Interviews lasted between one and two hours. Each respondent was assigned a code for the data analysis process to assure anonymity and to allow us to trace back to the original data if needed to check accuracy.

Extensive notes taken during the interviews were arranged into two sets of data tables that were organized by respondent group and by question. For each question, the answers from all

administrators were analyzed and distilled into categories. Tables were created for most questions to record the answers by category and by individual respondent code.

The next stage of data analysis consisted of analyzing the response categories for recurring themes and interesting patterns and writing a preliminary report for review and dialogue with a feedback panel of central office administrators from each district. Discussion of the findings and recommendations provided an opportunity to check for accuracy and to get additional insights into the meaning of the data from people who knew the district. Following the review of the preliminary drafts, revisions were made as needed and the three district reports were then ready for the next level of analysis — comparing and contrasting the commonalties and differences across the three districts.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY: DISTRICT POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND PROGRAMS

District Direction

The presence or absence of a *district*-developed strategic plan or a formally adopted mission and goals statement played a significant role in principals' sense of commitment to and ownership of student achievement and school improvement goals. Respondents in the mid-size district emphasized using a formally adopted district strategic plan and a standards-based philosophy, which was reported to be widely understood. The superintendent conducted seminars to ensure that district employees as well as parent and community groups knew and understood the components of the plan. Principals said they knew the district priorities and were expected to align school priorities with the district's. Central office staff reported that they reviewed and revised various district procedures to support the strategic plan. For example, grants were available for projects with a demonstrated link to the strategic plan.

The small district had three sources of direction: school improvement plans, a list of the board and superintendent's high priority goals, and state mandates. From the principals' perspectives, it was the state mandates that were driving district decision making. The inner-city district had a relatively new superintendent and board of education. At the time of the interviews, the board and superintendent were in the process of articulating a district direction and had initiated conversations with the community. The strategic plan adopted by the previous leadership team had not been replaced so it still provided a sense of district direction for many of the principals.

The priorities articulated within each district were not incompatible with one another or with a shared purpose of providing a good education for students. But the sense of a compelling vision and a clear set of priorities that set direction for the mid-size district were reported to empower administrators. They were doing rather than having something done to them. Everyone interviewed was internally motivated to do a good job; most entered administration so they could make a difference in the lives of students. All questioned the advisability of using state-mandated tests as the primary criterion of success. However, administrators in the mid-size district felt that they shared a common purpose directed toward a locally determined, desired end that encompassed but was not dominated by external demands. They repeatedly stressed how helpful that was to them as they made

day-to-day decisions. Respondents in the other districts expressed some frustration and complained about the lack of district direction. Their efforts were more focused on compliance with external expectations and helping the district avoid sanctions.

The use of monthly meetings for administrators provided insight into how well districts were using routine procedures to articulate and/or reinforce district direction. All three districts used the meetings to address a variety of administrative issues, including "hot topics" or current events. Central office administrators in the mid-size district used the strategic plan as a framework for the monthly administrators' meetings, and set aside time during each meeting to address some aspect of the plan or specific needs that they had identified among themselves or through their interactions with building administrators. The monthly meetings generally focused on instruction issues and occasionally addressed leadership development. Respondents from the small and large districts generally described their meetings as being frustrating and unfocused, with the majority of the time devoted to "administrivia," leaving limited opportunities to address the issues they were most concerned about as school leaders. In other words, they felt the meetings were designed to meet the needs of central office staff (top-down information dissemination) rather than principals. Both districts were making an effort to respond to principals' demands for more effective use of the monthly meetings and to provide more opportunities for principals to talk among themselves about building-level concerns.

District Culture

Common Values

There was a wide range of responses in every district when administrators (both central office and building based) were asked to identify the leadership characteristics or behaviors that seemed to be important. As might be expected, things often looked different from the central office perspective than from the principal's perspective, but there was a fair degree of agreement between the answers given by central office staff and principals.

Inner-city administrators identified student achievement and an ability to work effectively with the school community (the ethnic and racial diversity of the community was reflected in its schools) as district values. Some principals also mentioned instructional leadership and good management skills. Central office staff said that the district valued leaders who were change agents, but principals said they got the message that they were expected to keep problems to a minimum and keep people happy. They questioned how much the district really wanted them to take risks and make significant changes, especially if it might generate complaints to the central office.

Respondents from the mid-size district identified collegiality, initiative, competence, and an instructional focus as characteristics valued by the district. Secondary administrators mentioned character traits such as loyalty, dedication, and honesty and the importance of keeping problems to a minimum. Central office respondents had probably been more deeply involved in the development of the strategic plan, and were more likely to identify desirable leadership traits that were aligned with district direction. One factor distinguishing this district from the other two was that district leaders said they were *deliberately* working to create a culture that supported the work of school leaders and enhanced the potential for achieving the goals of the strategic plan. They were thinking

about ensuring future success and wary of making the district plan dependent on the presence of particular individuals.

Principals and central office staff in the small rural district were clear about the fact that their communities wanted them to prepare students for a productive future (although they weren't so sure that depended on academic achievement), and that they were expected to keep their staffs and communities happy. Attempts to find an appropriate balance between centralized and site-based decision making, evident in the large and small districts, were complicated by what seemed to be constantly changing external demands (i.e., new accreditation rules, new state tests, or state-generated performance reports).

Relationships Among Administrators

The relationships between building principals and between building administrators and their immediate supervisors were almost universally described as good. That is not to say there were no criticisms of central office, but rather that all of the principals who were interviewed felt their supervisors were caring and supportive.

Central office staff in the small district had made a systematic effort to build positive relationships across the three communities served by the district. Principals were expected to help each other be successful and new administrators relied on that informal network and the willingness of the more veteran administrators to help them through routine tasks. They felt free to call colleagues with questions or for ideas and received support from central office staff and from the board of education most of the time. Each principal had a fairly close relationship with the board members who represented their particular community.

Administrators in the mid-size district reported positive relationships and a sense that everyone was "in this together." Three quarters of the principals characterized their relationships with other principals as positive, using descriptors such as "collegial," "professional," and "respectful." They expressed appreciation for the openness, respect, helpfulness, and professionalism of the central office staff. They talked about small celebrations and get-togethers that facilitated a sense of district among them. They felt they had good support from the board of education.

Most of the inner-city principals described their relationships with peers as positive, supportive, and collegial. They created their own support system and subgroups based on common interests or shared experiences (e.g., if they had come through the districts' leadership preparation program together). These informal support groups met regularly and kept in close contact with each other. The district did not actively foster peer networking, but sometimes provided time at the beginning of monthly administrator meetings when principals could network. Elementary, middle and high school principals had established their own subcultures and reported limited interaction across levels. From the perspective of central office staff, principals support networks and connectedness to peers varied widely. They saw collegiality but they also saw competition and isolation.

Principals reported positive relationships with their supervisors, but relationships with central office in general varied with the individual, department, and issue involved. Uncertainty about

district direction, communication difficulties, fragmentation of central office tasks and responsibilities, and historical factors contributed to frustration and occasional strained relationships between individual principals and central office. Relationships with members of the board of education were either neutral or positive, and tended to be with individual board members rather than the board as a whole. One principal described it well — the "people are nice, but the system is hard."

Central office leaders in the small rural district had made a concerted and largely successful effort to foster collegiality and mutual support among principals, to compensate for the natural competitiveness that existed between the three communities served by the district. Respondents described a culture of mutual support and informal district expectations for collegiality, and *constructive* competition among principals in the mid-size district. Principals from the large district described the informal district culture as one of mutual support, attributed by some to a history of shared experiences with conflict. Central office respondents generally saw the district as fostering collegial relationships among administrators, but building-level respondents didn't always see it that way. Some felt the district fostered collegiality, some felt it fostered competition, and others viewed the district role as neutral.

In all three districts there were some programs and practices that promoted collegiality while others promoted competition. In spite of media reporting and ranking of school-level test scores, which encouraged comparisons and competition between schools, principals were more likely to work together in mutually supportive interpersonal relationships than to be in direct competition with each other.

Policies and Procedures

None of the districts had a formal, written leadership development plan, but all of them were actively involved in determining how to assure they had effective principals in their schools. A variety of policies and practices guided district activities in recruitment, personnel selection, and hiring. Those policies or practices were linked to the strategic plan in the mid-size district, where candidates were encouraged to consider whether the district's strategic plan was compatible with their personal beliefs. Central office leaders were considering the development of a leadership development program that could be clearly linked to district direction. Philosophical alignment was a hiring consideration in all three districts.

Entering Administration

Respondents reported that they had chosen administration for several reasons: (a) they wanted to make a difference and have a greater impact on students, staff, parents, and community; (b) they were interested in leadership; (c) they were recruited; or (d) they wanted a higher salary. They came to their districts in response to job opportunities in a setting that was compatible with their background and aspirations or because of the district's reputation. Some of the respondents in the large district said the challenge, diversity, and complexity of the urban setting energized them, while respondents from the mid-size district said they were attracted by the districts' reputation for a positive climate, solid student achievement, good professional development opportunities, clear focus, and strong leadership. Administrators in the small rural district were more likely to talk about the community as a good place to raise a family, or their own roots in rural America.

Recruitment. Recruitment practices were similar in the three districts and included advertising through the Internet, institutions of higher education (IHES), *Education Week*, state associations, and personal contacts. Central office administrators in the mid-size and large districts expressed concern about their ability to obtain the quality and quantity of candidates they would need due to growth and retirements and about assuring the kind of diversity in their administrative staff that they had in their communities. Central office and building administrators were clearly on the lookout for promising candidates, and took an active role in identifying, encouraging, and providing on-the-job-training for prospective principals.

The large district had developed partnerships with IHEs to train principals. These programs also increased the racial and ethnic diversity of principals, a high priority for the district and one that was supported by existing leaders at all levels. The mid-size district did not have its own leadership development program but it had partnership programs with nearby IHEs, and high potential candidates were encouraged to pursue administrator certification at their own expense.

The large district was the only one that offered incentives specifically for administrators. It had recently adjusted the administrative salary schedule to be competitive with neighboring districts. The district was using flexibility in the negotiation of starting salaries to encourage applications from principals from other districts (as opposed to simply being placed by years of experience), a practice that was not particularly appreciated by existing principals.

Selection. All three districts were looking for people with strong interpersonal skills who would be a good fit for the job and able to work with the school staff and the surrounding community. School staff, or their representatives, were involved in the hiring process in all three districts, and the small and the large districts reported community involvement in hiring principals.

The small district was looking for long-term commitment and people who could bring additional expertise or experience to the district. Although it blurs the lines of accountability, early involvement of board members in the selection process increased the likelihood of a good fit with the community and secured commitment to the success of the new principal. Teachers who aspired to the principalship indicated they would seek a position elsewhere. It was too hard to move from the teachers' lounge to administration in a small town. In essence, this small rural district was serving as an incubator for potential administrators who would serve elsewhere, often not too far away.

Central office administrators in the mid-size district were looking for candidates who were intelligent and willing to embrace the district mission. They were screening for a good fit with the requirements of the job, the culture of the community, and the building, instructional expertise, and leadership potential.

The large district had a process to screen candidates that was continually critiqued and revised. Candidates were screened for interpersonal skills, leadership experience, decision-making skills, communication and work style (especially an ability to bring diverse groups together), and management skills. The district was looking for leaders who had a "motivational presence" and a

passion for educating all children. Central office provided a short list of promising candidates to the school level and the superintendent.

Preparation for administration. Principals in the small district were most likely to say their formal course work had been useful preparation for the job. The real preparation had been through their experiences as coaches, special education or alternative education teachers, and various opportunities they'd had to fill in for the principal while they were still teaching. The mid-size and inner-city districts offered many more development opportunities. Committee work, internships, and position assignments such as TOSA (Teacher on Special Assignment), dean of students, and assistant principal positions all offered a chance to explore and learn about oneself as a leader. Principals from all three districts said they learned from formal and/or informal mentors, role models, personal networks, and collegial sharing. Those with special education or counseling backgrounds said these experiences had proved especially helpful for them, emphasizing the importance of strong interpersonal skills. There was no substitute for on-the-job learning, but it was most effective if it was reasonably diverse and if promising candidates were systematically encouraged to move into well-supported, safe situations prior to becoming principals. Working under a skillful administrator who was also able and willing to nurture administrative talent was most valuable, and too often determined by the luck of the draw.

District support for new administrators. All three districts were more attentive to providing support for new administrators than for veteran administrators. All three provided one-on-one support and supervisors who were readily available to assist as needed — support that was deeply appreciated by new administrators. Specific programmatic assistance will be described later in this report.

Budget

The small rural district was the only one that had a line item in both building and district budgets specifically designated for administrators' professional development. In the mid-size and large districts, there was limited funding available specifically for leadership development activities and these dollars were dispersed in the budgets of various district-level administrators. The money allocated to leadership development in the mid-size district was estimated at less than one percent of the general fund, an amount that had decreased over time. District funds were generally used to attend seminars or conferences and to bring in consultants. Central office staff and/or building leaders in all three districts reported that they aggressively pursued professional development opportunities from external sources.

Central office administrators in the rural district were actively involved in the identification of appropriate conferences and strongly encouraged principals' attendance at certain state conferences that were aligned with district priorities. Rural principals also had funding and were encouraged to attend a national conference every second year.

Mid-size and large district principals had line items in their budgets for professional development, but those funds were for all staff. Technically they could use those funds for their own professional development, but most were reluctant to do so. In the inner-city district, administrators felt the community and staff members of the school-based decision-making teams would view the

use of funds for principals' professional development as taking dollars away from the classroom. Principals from both districts reported paying for their own leadership development. There were also opportunities to attend national conferences, particularly if the conferences were being held locally, but some building administrators didn't know funds were available or how to access them.

Individual needs and preferences drove decisions about expenditures at the school level so alignment between principals' leadership development and district priorities occurred informally through conversations with supervisors and the evaluation process. This variable pattern of expenditures means that leadership development occurred unevenly in each of the three districts, particularly in the mid-size and large districts. None of the districts had a formal evaluation system to determine whether district leadership development funds were being spent effectively, and there was no centralized system for tracking expenditures for leadership development at the school level or for assessing impact.

Leadership Development Programs or Activities

Responsibility for Leadership Development

The superintendent in the small district assumed primary responsibility for assuring the development of the principals. In the other two districts, the responsibility for leadership development belonged to everyone and no one. Relatively good communications among central office staff in the mid-size district served administrative staff fairly well, and administrators were encouraged to participate in district sponsored professional development activities with their teachers. There were relatively few seminars and workshops specifically for administrators, but principals reported that they were hungry for more help in developing their leadership skills.

Leadership Programs

In the small district, there was no formal or readily identifiable leadership development program. However, good communications and support from central office staff and peers; budgets specifically designated for administrators' professional development; and direction and encouragement from central office provided many opportunities for building principals to develop their leadership skills if they chose to take advantage of them.

The mid-size district had an identifiable, fairly well-structured set of programs and activities that supported the induction and ongoing development of school administrators. Central office offered leadership development opportunities that included conference attendance, administrator induction, access to external expertise (i.e., by bringing in consultants, outside experts, and individuals from higher education), and help with skills needed for cognitive coaching, school improvement, or data-driven decision making. Respondents noted that few of these offerings were geared specifically to administrators. Communication and support systems among district administrators were good, and the monthly administrators' meetings were being used to send consistent messages to all principals.

Responsibilities for leadership support in the large district were distributed across many different departments and each department made its own decisions about what it would offer. Most

of the activity was aimed at professional development for teachers but principals could attend as well. The district had spent a lot of money on staff development, but it reported to be "disorganized." The district had recently hired a consultant to help them establish an overall direction for staff development for teachers. Almost half of central office staff said there was essentially nothing being done for leadership development. Principals reported that they were frustrated and asked for help to develop their leadership skills. The assistant principals consistently spent about half the time in their monthly meetings on leadership development topics, but principals' meetings were filled with short presentations and less time was devoted to developmental needs. Uncertainty about district priorities due to board and superintendent turnover, the absence of a well-coordinated program from the central office that could help them learn what was expected of them, and a negative political climate weighed heavily on principals.

Induction. All three of the districts reported that they provided good support to new principals. Even though new principals sometimes reported that they were "sort of thrown in" to their new positions, they found central staff supportive whenever they called with questions, and veteran principals were available and generous with their assistance. The structure of that support varied.

In the small district, the superintendent and director of instruction provided one-on-one assistance to new principals. The mid-size district provided an induction program that included (1) monthly meetings dealing with topics such as district goals, teacher evaluation, hot issues, district culture, a primer of district practices, and discussions of pertinent educational articles; (2) a trained mentor for collegial conversation and seasoned advice; and (3) a requirement that administrators attend the superintendent's seminar on the district strategic plan. The multi-strategy process provided for both generic and individual needs.

In the large district, help for new principals was handled independently and differently by the elementary and secondary departments. The elementary department provided a summer training program supplemented by monthly meetings for new principals, with a portion of these meetings devoted to staff development. New secondary principals did not meet as a group on any regular basis, but education staff met regularly with them in a one-on-one format. The district was thinking about reinstituting formal meetings. Central office supervisors tried to keep in touch with new principals on an informal basis. Provision of mentors was inconsistent and the quality of their assistance was uneven. Respondents' comments indicated it wasn't clear which person or what department was responsible for the induction program, possibly resulting in the inconsistencies reported. Central office knew the induction process needed improvement.

Respondents from all three districts reported benefits from the induction programs and processes. Meetings with central office personnel and other inductees promoted collegial conversations and networking. They valued "handholding" as they dealt with paperwork and district deadlines, knowing that they "were not alone," and the opportunity to learn about the district and its priorities. They appreciated the support, availability, and feedback provided by mentors, supervisors, and/or other central office staff. Regardless of the support received, many respondents reported a "sink or swim" situation when they assumed the principalship.

Support for experienced administrators. None of these districts provided a formal, structured program specifically geared for veteran principals. The mid-size district's monthly

meetings were reported to be the most satisfying to principals and central office staff. In all the districts, staff development programs focusing on building the skills of teachers were open to administrators. While building administrators benefitted from their participation, most wanted more help with their leadership skills.

Principals valued opportunities to network with colleagues and to gain broader exposure to new ideas and different perspectives. This was especially important in the small district and the urban district. Since so many principals had come up through the system, including participating in the district's administrator preparation program, they needed exposure to fresh ideas and alternative perspectives. Both of the larger districts had limited funds that could be used for principals' professional development, but the availability of those funds was not well advertised, nor were the procedures to follow to access those funds. Although many building level respondents had participated in leadership development activities outside the district, they said their districts, for the most part, did not require any reporting or feedback regarding these experiences. Many said they applied what they had learned within their buildings.

In all of the districts, veteran principals were expected to figure out what they needed to do to improve student results and to call for assistance as they saw fit. Central office staff tried to keep principals informed about activities at the state and national level. District-supported leadership development offerings were limited in all of the districts. The mid-size district did not differentiate programs for teachers vs. those for administrators and viewed all building staff as "educational interventionists." Central office wanted the two groups to be on the same page.

In the large and mid-size districts, the skill and attitudes of their supervising principals heavily influenced assistant principals' development. The development of assistant principals was an issue of concern in the mid-size district, where their training tended to deal with job-specific, nuts-and-bolts issues rather than instruction and/or district priorities.

In the large district, workshops for principals tended to focus on topics such as sexual harassment, technology, budget, arbitration and teacher evaluation. Principals valued those offerings but wanted more.

District size was a key factor influencing the comprehensiveness of the district's internal offerings. Central office staff were more likely than building principals to view the central office as a source of ideas about promising practices. Even in the mid-size district, only about half of the principals mentioned administrators' meetings as a source of ideas of promising approaches. Respondents in all of the districts used a variety of venues to gather information about promising practices: networking within and outside their districts, personal reading, professional journals and organizations such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and the National Staff Development Council, conferences, administrators' associations, the state department of education, higher education, and the regional education laboratories.

Evaluation of leadership development. The lack of a leadership development plan and an associated evaluation system made it difficult to determine on a global basis which programs or practices were most effective. Evaluation of several program components was based on informal conversation, surveys, evaluations of courses and programs (e.g., the induction program), and the

success of graduates from the leadership program in the large district. None had formally evaluated the effectiveness of their leadership training and support systems.

Most effective leadership development experiences. Administrators from all three districts said they learned the most from on-the-job learning, the support they received from their supervisors and other central office staff members, networking with peers, and day-to-day problem solving. Conference attendance and work with external agencies was also a factor in their professional development. District culture, district leaders' support for a strategic plan, classes and workshops about instruction, and assistance and training on budget, personnel, and legal issues were all cited as valuable on-the-job learning. Knowledgeable feedback, encouragement, and recognition from supervisors were reported to be important.

Feedback about Performance

Formal Feedback

The formal evaluation process used to evaluate administrators was similar across districts. The principal or assistant principal and his or her supervisor met at the beginning of the cycle to discuss and establish goals for the upcoming year. During the year, the supervisor made an onsite visit and at the end of the year, they met again to discuss the degree to which goals had been met and to complete the district evaluation form. Generally the formal write-up consisted of a checklist with some narrative. All of the districts did annual evaluations when principals were new to the job or the district, and the rural district continued annual evaluations regardless of tenure in the district. The mid-size district went through a formal process annually for the first three years, and then veteran administrators were evaluated less frequently. An annual evaluation for all administrators was the stated goal in the urban district, but a few respondents said the process is not followed consistently. Central office staff spoke of being stretched thin and building principals wanted more time and attention than they were getting.

Principals provided documentation about their performance. The mid-size district was encouraging experimentation with feedback from multiple constituents (e.g., students, teachers, and parents) and the urban district was moving to a definition of successful performance based on state tests.

The benefits to administrators included the opportunity to reflect on what had been accomplished during the year, to get individual attention and feedback from supervisors, and to get the district perspective through problem solving and goal setting with their supervisors. Central office staff gained useful information about building activities, assured compliance with the law, obtained a paper trail of performance, and clarified and reinforced district goals or priorities. The superintendent in the small district was satisfied with the current evaluation process; the mid-size district was in the process of revising its evaluation process to be aligned with the strategic plan; and the urban district had just revised its evaluation process to reflect a new emphasis on student test scores. The district was considering further revisions that would expand the definition of successful performance.

Informal Feedback

Informal feedback from district supervisors consisted of notes, e-mail messages, phone calls, or personal conversations. Such feedback was always appreciated, but principals really relied on the feedback from within their buildings to let them know if they were doing a good job. When their schools "hummed," they knew everyone was busy and basically happy. In the words of one respondent, "I don't have migraines, things go smoothly, teachers are working, kids are smiling, and parents are not complaining." Interestingly, no one mentioned learning that he or she was doing a good job through the evaluation process.

If a building leader did something wrong or tried something that didn't work, it was usually dealt with it at the building level. If there was a conversation with a supervisor, most of the building leaders interviewed said they had an opportunity to present their side of the story and that they were encouraged to learn from their mistakes. Principals who had received support from central office staff during trying times were grateful. Consequences depended on the seriousness of the issue.

Linkage with District Direction

The small district's evaluation process was aligned with district direction in that job targets were focused on compliance with state mandates, school improvement goals and accreditation requirements. Sixty percent (60%) of the building-level respondents from the mid-size district perceived either a weak relationship between the evaluation process and the district strategic plan or no relationship at all. A few saw a relationship in that their evaluations were tied to school goals, which in turn were tied to the strategic plan. The district was working on alignment, and some administrators postulated that evaluations eventually would be linked to student performance. The inner-city district was the only one that had linked principal performance to student achievement on state tests. Most principals believed that school goals soon would be the same as the district's goals and would be focused on these state tests. One central office administrator speculated that if a school's results were negative or flat, that principal would be replaced.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Although school and district leadership was reported to be an important topic in each district studied, opinions varied about the most important characteristics of effective leadership. Increasing achievement, preparing students for productive futures, focusing on instruction, the ability to work with school communities, being a change agent, solving problems, collegiality, and responding to external demands were cited as important leadership characteristics. None of the three districts had a formal, written leadership development plan, so leadership development occurred in the context of existing policies and practices related to recruiting, selecting, hiring, and supervising administrators. One of the districts was considering the need for a leadership development program linked to district direction.

Respondents indicated that they had good relationships with most of their peers, supervisors, and supervisees and that their supervisors for the most part were caring and supportive. Both formal and informal support systems for developing shared leadership values and supportive relationships

were described in each district. Support systems among administrators were formally developed through meetings of administrators about work on district plans and direction. Support networks also were reported to develop informally among administrators around common interests and activities in their jobs. In all three districts, respondents mentioned that some programs and policies resulted in competition instead of collegiality.

Respondents from all three districts reported that providing competitive salaries and benefits was important. Selection processes emphasized agreement with the district plan or direction, strong interpersonal skills and good relationships with communities. All three districts reportedly provided support for new administrators more consistently than for veteran administrators. In particular, they provided one-on-one support for new administrators that was reported to be very valuable. Respondents indicated that central office staff members were helpful in answering questions and that veteran principals were available and generous with their assistance.

One district budgeted specifically at the district and school levels for leadership professional development. In two districts, money was available for leadership development primarily for consultants or to attend seminars or conferences. Staff members in each district reported that they aggressively pursued external funding for leadership professional development and monitored opportunities that were consistent with district priorities. Principals from two districts reported that they personally paid for some professional development. In some cases, they did not know that funds were available or how to access them.

Responsibility for leadership development was not highly centralized, and the amount and kinds of professional development varied within and across districts. Decisions about what kinds of activities to pursue and how to fund them were made on the basis of individual needs and preferences, in consultation with supervisors. Each district held meetings for administrators that served as professional development and support, but the districts varied in the structure and frequency of the meetings. For example, in the largest district, elementary and secondary principals met separately or in groups of feeder schools. In some cases, formal mentor relationships were established, but the quality of the mentoring varied. Although respondents indicated that they felt "thrown into" their jobs, they valued induction activities for providing information and networking.

Veteran administrators reported that they were expected to figure out what they needed to improve student results and ask for assistance. District-sponsored workshops tended to focus on topics that were concrete, such as budgets, arbitration, and teacher evaluation. These were described as valuable but not sufficient to meet administrators' needs. Principals reported that they valued opportunities to network with colleagues and gain a broader exposure to new ideas and different perspectives. Central office staff reported trying to inform principals about activities at the state and national levels. Respondents identified several ways to find out about promising education practices, including networking within and outside their districts, professional journals and organizations, conferences, the state department of education, and regional laboratories.

None of the districts formally evaluated the effectiveness of professional development funds or activities. Administrators in each district said they learned the most on the job, with support from their supervisors, other central office staff members, and networking with peers.

Performance evaluation processes for school administrators were similar across the districts, but the relationship between evaluation processes and district goals was not perceived to be clear. A principal or assistant principal would meet with a supervisor to discuss and establish goals for the year. During the year, the supervisor would visit on-site, review progress toward the goals, and complete the district evaluation form. New principals were evaluated more often and more regularly than were experienced administrators. They were responsible for documenting their own performance. Benefits cited were the opportunity to reflect on accomplishments, individual attention and feedback, and joint problem solving and goal setting. The central office gained information about building-level activities reported by principals, assured compliance with legal requirements, documented performance, and clarified district goals and priorities. Administrator evaluation processes were under revision in two districts. Informal sources of feedback included notes, e-mail, phone calls, and informal meetings.

These results indicate that districts should consider a systematic, coordinated approach to leadership recruitment, training, professional development, and performance evaluation. Recruitment strategies are primarily informal and might more specifically target critical attributes of leaders. Leadership training is primarily the domain of local institutions of higher education, with limited oversight by districts. Although resources are being devoted to professional development and performance evaluation, the resources would be more effectively leveraged if there was an overall plan, with clear goals and a process for evaluating the impact and effectiveness of activities. Decisions about leadership development should take into account individuals' diverse needs at various points in their careers and how professional development contributes to achieving the district's goals and priorities. Since much of the time spent in meetings is devoted to disseminating information among administrators, consideration needs to be given and time allocated specifically for professional learning and support systems. Performance evaluation systems should be structured to reinforce convergence between individuals' professional development and the district's goals.

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